

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 NIC-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-15

USIA-15 SAJ-01 OMB-01 RSR-01 /098 W

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FM AMEMBASSY PRAGUE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4964

C O N F I D E N T I A L PRAGUE 2002

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, CZ

SUBJECT: CZECHOSLOVAKIA FIVE YEARS AFTER

1. EXCEPT FOR WESTERN PRESS AND FOR PEKING, FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF SOVIET INVASION OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA PASSED ALMOST WITHOUT NOTICE. WHILE THIS HARDLY MEANS CZECH POPULATION OR LEADERS HAVE FORGOTTEN 1968 SPRING OR SUDDEN WINTER WHICH ENDED IT, IT FEEDS TEMPTATION TO LOOK AT STATE OF AFFAIRS AND AT RESIDUAL IMPACT OF INVASION AFTER FIVE YEARS. IN THESE TERMS, INTERNAL SCENE SEEMS CHARACTERIZED MOST BY: (1) WIDESPREAD FEELING THAT PHYSICAL CONDITIONS OF LIFE (EXCEPT FOR ENDEMIC PROBLEM OF HOUSING) ARE NOT BAD AND IMPROVING; (2) ATROPHY IN POLITICAL CONCERNS OF POPULATION WHICH, HAVING LOST HOPE OF EARLY SECOND SPRING, HAS -- WITH EXCEPTION OF SOME INTELLECTUALS -- GENERALLY LOST INTEREST IN POLITICS; (3) FLOWING FROM (1) AND (2), PREOCCUPATION WITH GETTING ALONG, LIVING COMFORTABLY AND, WITH POSSIBILITIES GROWING, TRAVELLING TO WEST ON VACATION. BEYOND BORDERS, FEATURES ARE: (1) CONTINUING ORTHODOXY OF LEADERSHIP IN RELATIONS WITH USSR AND ALLIES, COUPLED WITH DEEP POPULAR HATRED FOR RUSSIANS AND TOTAL CYNICISM TOWARD ALLIANCE WITH EASTERN NEIGHBORS; (2) PURPOSEFUL EFFORT BY LEADERSHIP TO RESTORE ITS REPUTATION AND COUNTRY'S BY WIDENING CONTACTS WITH OTHER COUNTRIES; AND (3) PARTLY IN THIS CONTEXT, FORCEFULLY PURSUING IMPROVED RELATIONS WITH US, RESULTS OF WHICH ARE ALREADY APPARENT IN

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INCREASED TRADE AND BILATERAL AGREEMENTS SIGNED OR PENDING.

SEEN FROM THIS VANTAGE POINT -- AND ACCEPTING PREMISE THAT PRAGUE SPRING WAS DOOMED AS SOON AS IT BECAME SIGNIFICANT -- CZECHOSLOVAKIA CAN IN MANY WAYS BE SEEN TODAY AS PROGRESSING ON COURSE FROM PRE-1968, FROM WHICH PAST FIVE-AND-ONE-HALF YEARS WERE FIRST EXHILARATING AND THEN TRAGIC ABERRATION. END SUMMARY.

2. PRAGUE THIS WEEK WAS, ON SURFACE, DIFFERENT FROM LAST WEEK OR NEXT WEEK ONLY IN PRESENCE OF MODEST POLICE REINFORCEMENTS. HUSAK FELT ABLE TO BOAST THIS WEEK THAT PEOPLE WENT ABOUT WORK AND PLAY AS USUAL ON ANNIVERSARY. POLICE, TO INSURE NORMAL WORK AND PLAY, HAD INSTALLED "CONSTRUCTION" FENCE BLOCKING ACCESS TO PORTION OF PRAGUE CEMETERY SURROUNDING JAN PALACH GRAVE. NEVERTHELESS, AVERAGE CZECHOSLOVAK DID GO ABOUT BUSINESS ALBEIT WITH TIME OUT TO SHED A TEAR IN HIS BEER. EMIL ZATOPEK, FORMER OLYMPIC CHAMPION AND SINGER OF 1968 DECLARATION ("2000 WORDS"), WHO WAS THEN NATIONAL HERO UNTIL HE LATER RECANTED, WAS SEEN AUGUST 20 MUTTERING INTO BEER "FIVE YEARS, FIVE YEARS." SUCH BRIEF REMINISCENCE ASIDE, MOST CZECHS HAVE LEARNED TO LIVE WITH THE POSSIBLE, AND SEEM INCREASINGLY ABLE TO SEPARATE SAD MEMORY OF WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN FROM QUITE TOLERABLE CONDITIONS OF LIFE. EXCEPT FOR PLUCKY FEW CREATIVE INTELLECTUALS AND MUCH LARGER, IF STILL LIMITED, NUMBER WHO HAVE LOST JOBS OR STATUS IN POST-1968 PURGES, PRAGUE SPRING HAS COME TO BE, SEEN, AS WITH CHILDHOOD, HAPPY INTERLUDE WHICH CANNOT BE REPEATED AND WITHOUT WHICH ONE LIVES ACCEPTABLY.

3. WHILE WHAT LEADERSHIP LIKES TO DESCRIBE AS CZECHOSLOVAKIA'S INCREASING ROLE AND AUTHORITY ON WORLD SCENE IS LARGELY ATMOSPHERIC, SOME BILATERAL RELATIONSHIPS HAVE DEVELOPED SUBSTANTIALLY. WITH US, IT IS IN SENSE IRONIC THAT GOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS ARE ALREADY MORE ACTIVE THAN IN 1967-68, AND SHOW PROMISE OF MOVING STRONGLY, ALONG LINES OF OTHER MORE "NORMAL" WARSAW PACT ALLIES. GIVEN SUCCESS IN NEXT MONTH'S CLAIMS NEGOTIATIONS, COUPLED LATER WITH GRANT OF MFN, PROSPECTS FOR MAJOR EXPANSION OF PURCHASES IN US MARKET SEEM BRING.

4. AT COST OF SEEMING TO BRUSH ASIDE UNSIGHTLY EVENTS OF AUGUST 1968 AND SINCE, AS WELL AS RESIDUAL SORES, ONE MAY WELL CONFIDENTIAL

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JUDGE SITUATION AS HAVING EVOLVED BACK TOWARD "NORMALCY." IF A NATION'S AFFAIRS CAN BE CHARTED ON GRAPH, WITH PRAGUE SPRING AS PEAK AND SUBSEQUENT YEARS AS VALLEY, CZECHOSLOVAKIA MAY BY FIFTH ANNIVERSARY BE BACK NEAR CONTINUUM IF THIS UPHEAVAL HAD NEVER OCCURRED. THIS MAY HELP EXPLAIN AND JUSTIFY RECENT TREND ALONG LINE ON WHICH US POLICY IS CHARTED. WORTZEL

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